

Azdud (Ashdod-Yam): An Early Islamic Fortress on the Mediterranean Coast. (British Archaeological Report International Series 2673). By Sarah Kate Raphael. 21 x 30 cm. v + 111pp, 36 b&w pls and figs, 48 tables. Oxford: Archaeopress, 2014. ISBN 978-1-4073-1315-3. Price: 26.00 pb.

This book purports to present the results of excavations by the Israel Antiquity Authority in 1997-9 at the medieval site *Māhūz Azdūd*, now known as Ashdod-Yam or Minat al-Qal'a, in Israel. Once thought to date to the 10th - 11th centuries, these excavations revealed that this small coastal fort (35 x 55m) was in fact built in the late 7th century over the razed insulae of the Byzantine town *Azotus Paraliou*s as part of a broader system of early Umayyad maritime fortifications on the coast of Palestine, and only later remodelled by the Fatimids and Crusaders. The title, however, is misleading. Much of this slim book is dedicated to a useful discussion of maritime warfare and the coastal defensive system in the medieval Eastern Mediterranean (Ch 1, 2 and 4). Archaeologists will find it frustrating that only 4 pages are dedicated to the fort and the excavations (Ch 3), and none to the broader history of the site or region. Five periods of occupation were identified (Byzantine, Umayyad, Abbasid, Fatimid and Crusader) though the author provides us with cursory overviews for only three of these phases and a single multi-phase plan. Brief, well-illustrated reports follow on the ceramics (Ch 5), coins (Ch 6) and small finds (Ch 7 and 8) though the absence of stratigraphic information in Ch 3 makes it impossible to reconstruct the distribution of finds by phase. In sum, this book serves as a useful introduction to the maritime fortifications of Syria-Palestine, but the task of publishing a comprehensive study of the archaeology and architecture of this important medieval fort remains to be done.

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